

No prohibited "new matter" has been added in the substitute specification.

In the Claims

Please amend claims 11, 12, and 20 as follows:

b3 C1 11. (Amended) A tight lace-up device adapted to equip footwear, the footwear including

two portions to be brought closer together with said device, said device comprising:

a tightening zone comprising return elements positioned on said portions;

a linkage including two ends, said linkage connecting, along a predetermined path, at least two return elements arranged on different respective ones of said footwear portions, said linkage forming a loop outside said tightening zone;

a means for locking said linkage;

a gripping device arranged on said linkage in an area of said loop, said gripping device enabling a user to pull efficiently on said linkage with at least one hand, said gripping device comprising a frame for distributing tension of said linkage over a hand of the user.

12. (Amended) A lace-up device according to claim 11, wherein said frame is rigid.

b3 C17 20. (Amended) A lace-up device according to claim 11, wherein said locking means is

integrated into a locking element, said locking element being slidably mounted on said loop.

Please add new claims 21-41 as follows:

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-- 21. (New) A lace-up device according to claim 11, wherein said loop is formed by two portions of said linkage outside said tightening zone, said frame of said gripping device serving to space apart said two portions of said linkage.

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22. (New) A lace-up device according to claim 11, wherein said loop is formed by two portions of said linkage outside said tightening zone, said two portions of said linkage being connected to said frame of said gripping device at two spaced-apart locations of said frame.

23. (New) A lace-up device according to claim 11, wherein said locking means is integrated into said return elements positioned at a junction of said tightening zone and said loop, for maintaining tension in said tightening zone.

24. (New) A lace-up device according to claim 11, wherein said locking means comprises a locking structure contained within each of at least said two return elements, said locking means further comprising a locking element slidably mounted on said loop.

25. (New) A lace-up device according to claim 13, wherein said contact surface comprises at least three successively arranged cavities, each of said three cavities corresponding to a respective one of three fingers of the hand of the user.

26. (New) A lace-up device according to claim 16, wherein said means for locking said linkage comprises means for maintaining said tension in said lower one of said two tightening zones independent of a tension in an upper one of said two tightening zones.

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27. (New) A lace-up device adapted to equip footwear, the footwear including two portions to be brought closer together with said device, said device comprising:

a tightening zone comprising return elements positioned on said portions;
a linkage including two ends, said linkage connecting, along a predetermined path, at least two return elements arranged on different respective ones of said footwear portions for applying a tightening tension on said linkage in said tightening zone, said linkage being slidable with respect to said return elements;

a linkage tension maintaining structure to maintain said tightening tension on said linkage in said tightening zone;

said linkage comprising two linkage portions forming a loop outside said tightening zone;

a gripping device arranged on said linkage in an area of said loop, said gripping device comprising a frame serving to space apart said two portions of said linkage to allow fingers of a hand of a user to extend within said loop, to engage said frame, and to pull on said linkage with said hand.

28. (New) A lace-up device according to claim 27, wherein said linkage tension maintaining structure is integrated within said return elements positioned at a junction of said tightening zone and said loop.

29. (New) A lace-up device according to claim 27, wherein said linkage tension maintaining structure comprises a locking structure contained within each of at least said two return elements, said linkage tension maintaining structure further comprising a locking element slidably mounted on said loop.

30. (New) A lace-up device according to claim 27, wherein said tightening zone comprises at least two zones separated by at least one return element positioned on each of respective ones of said portions of said footwear, and wherein said locking means comprises means for maintaining a tension in a first of said two tightening zones independent of a tension in a second of said two tightening zones.

31. (New) An article of footwear comprising:

an upper comprising two portions to be brought closer together to tighten the article of footwear upon a foot;

a lace-up device comprising:

a tightening zone comprising at least two return elements positioned on respective ones of said portions of said upper;

a linkage including two ends, said linkage connecting, along a predetermined path, at least said two return elements for applying a tightening tension on said linkage in said tightening zone, said linkage being slid able with respect to said two return elements;

a linkage tension maintaining structure to maintain said tightening tension on said linkage in said tightening zone;

said linkage comprising two linkage portions forming a loop outside said tightening zone;

a gripping device arranged on said linkage in an area of said loop, said gripping device comprising a frame serving to space apart said two portions of said linkage to allow fingers of a hand of a user to extend within said loop, to engage said frame, and to pull on said linkage with said hand.

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32. (New) An article of footwear according to claim 31, wherein said linkage tension maintaining structure is integrated within said return elements positioned at a junction of said tightening zone and said loop.

33. (New) An article of footwear according to claim 31, wherein said linkage tension maintaining structure comprises a locking structure contained within each of at least said two return elements, said linkage tension maintaining structure further comprising a locking element slidably mounted on said loop.

34. (New) An article of footwear according to claim 31, wherein said upper is a high upper, said high upper including a lower portion extending to an area of an ankle of a foot and an upper portion extending above the lower portion.

35. (New) An article of footwear according to claim 34, wherein said tightening zone comprises a lower zone for tightening said lower portion of said upper and an upper zone for tightening said upper portion of said upper, said lower and upper zones being separated by at least one return element positioned on each of respective ones of said portions of said upper.

36. (New) An article of footwear according to claim 35, wherein said linkage tension maintaining structure comprises means for maintaining a tension in said lower tightening zone independent of a tension in said upper tightening zone.

37. (New) An article of footwear according to claim 36, wherein said linkage comprises one and only one lacing extending through said lower and upper tightening zones.

38. (New) An article of footwear according to claim 36, wherein said linkage is continuous from a bottom of said lower tightening zone to a top of said upper tightening zone.

39. (New) An article of footwear according to claim 36, wherein said lower tightening zone extends from a metatarsophalangeal articulation area to an ankle area.

40. (New) An article of footwear according to claim 31, wherein said tightening zone comprises at least two zones separated by at least one return element positioned on each of respective ones of said portions of said upper, and wherein said linkage tension maintaining structure comprises means for maintaining a tension in a first of said two tightening zones independent of a tension in a second of said two tightening zones.

41. (New) An article of footwear according to claim 31, wherein said frame of said gripping device is rigid. --